

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 EA-11 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02 INR-10

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-15 USIA-12

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FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8235

INFO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 2843

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR IT VS

SUBJ: PRESIDENT THIEU' S VISIT TO ROME

REF: ROME 2685; ROME 2751

1. SUMMARY. PRESIDENT THIEU AND PARTY VISITED ROME APRIL 8-10. THIEU WAS RECEIVED BY PRESIDENT LEONE AND HAD AUDIENCE WITH POPE PAUL. IN CONVERSATIONS WITH ITALIANS, SOUTH VIETNAMESE STRESSED THEIR WILLINGNESS FOR PEACEFUL CO- EXISTENCE WITH ALL NEIGHBORS, EXPLAINED PRISONER PROBLEM, STRONGLY OPPOSED ANY ACTION THAT WOULD ENHANCE STATUS OF PRG AND CALLED FOR EUROPEAN ROLE IN S. E. ASIA. ITALIANS RECEIVED EXTREMELY FAVORABLE IMPRESSION OF THIEU, EXPLAINED THEIR RECENT CONTACT WITH PRG OFFICIALS, AND STATED THEIR READINESS TO PROVIDE AID TO VIET NAM IN EC CONTEXT. SERIES OF ANTI- THIEU DEMONSTRATIONS SPONSORED BY VARIOUS LEFTIST GROUPS WERE CAREFULLY CONTAINED BY ITALIAN SECURITY AUTHORITIES. END SUMMARY.

2. GVN PRESIDENT THIEU ACCOMPANIED BY NINETY- MEMBER OFFICIAL PARTY WHICH INCLUDED MRS. THIEU AND FONMIN TRAN VAN LAM ARRIVED ROME APRIL 8 AND DEPARTED MORNING OF APRIL 10 ENROUTE TO LONDON. THIEU' S PRINCIPAL ACTIVITIES WERE MEETING WITH ITALIAN PRESIDENT LEONE AND AUDIENCE WITH POPE PAUL. (VATICAN ASPECTS WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL

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SEPARATELY REPORTED.)

3. ON APRIL 10 RESPONSIBLE ITALIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL GAVE US ACCOUNT OF THIEU MEETING WITH LEONE AT WHICH FONMIN LAM AND ITALIAN FONMIN MEDICI WERE ALSO PRESENT. OFFICIAL SAID THIEU TOOK GENERAL LINE THAT GVN DESIRES TO LIVE IN PEACE WITH ALL ITS NEIGHBORS INCLUDING DRV, LAOS AND CAMBODIA. RE DRV, THIEU ASSERTED THAT " GREAT POWERS" MUST CEASE TYPE OF AID TO HANOI WHICH PERMITS IT TO CONTINUE AGGRESSION. CONCERNING PRG, THIEU SAID GVN PREPARED FOR FULL COOPERATION TO ARRANGE FOR ELECTIONS AT EARLIEST POSSIBLE MOMENT. HE COMMENTED THAT PRG APPEARS TO WISH ELECTIONS DELAYED. THIEU SAID HE PREPARED TO ACCEPT RESULTS OF FREE ELECTIONS IN SOUTH AND EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT PEOPLE OF SOUTH VIETNAM WOULD NEVER VOTE FREELY FOR COMMUNIST REGIME. HE STRESSED THAT HANOI MUST CEASE ITS INFILTRATION AND AID TO PRG. THIEU EMPHASIZED NEED FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION TO ASSURE AREA STABILITY, AND SAID EUROPE HAS ROLE TO PLAY IN AREA, PARTICULARLY BECAUSE OF PHASING- DOWN OF US PRESENCE.

4. ACCORDING SOURCE, FONMIN TRAM VAN LAM ECHOED PRESIDENT THIEU' S REMARKS STATING GVN PREPARED TO COOPERATE WITH HANOI BUT INFILTRATION MUST STOP. LAM SAID GVN APPROVED ESTABLISHMENT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN ITALY AND OTHER EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WITH DRV SINCE IT BELIEVED THIS WOULD HAVE RESTRAINING INFLUENCE ON HANOI WHICH WOULD ALSO PROFIT FROM EXAMPLE OF ADDITIONAL EUROPEANS ON SCENE IN HANOI. LAM INSISTED, HOWEVER, THAT DRV MUST ACCEPT LEGITIMACY OF SAIGON GOVERNMENT AS GVN ACCEPTS LEGITIMACY OF HANOI.

5. OFFICIAL SAID LAM TOOK VERY STRONG STAND AGAINST RELATIONS AND CONTACTS WITH PRG WHICH HE SAID VERY MUCH DIFFERENT IN EVERY RESPECT FROM DRV. HE STRESSED THAT PRG NOT RPT NOT A GOVERNMENT AND IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY DANGEROUS TO ENCOURAGE ITS PRETENSIONS OR ENHANCE ITS PRESTIGE IN ANY WAY. LAM SAID THAT PRG SUCCESS IN ARROGATING TO ITSELF PREROGATIVES OF A GOVERNMENT HAD DANGEROUS IMPLICATIONS FOR SUCH COUNTRIES AS THAILAND, MALAYSIA AND INDONESIA AND EVEN ITALY ITSELF. (COMMENT: FONOFF OFFICIAL REMARKED THAT LAM' S BOLD MENTION OF ITALY IN THIS CONTEXT HAD VERY SOBERING EFFECT, PARTICULARLY ON FONMIN MEDICI.) IN RESPONSE TO QUERY, SOURCE SAID THAT LAM DID NOT MAKE SPECIFIC MENTION OF MEDICI' S RECENT MEETING WITH CONFIDENTIAL

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PRG CHIEF OF PARIS DELEGATION HIEU ALTHOUGH IMPLICATION WAS CLEAR.

6. RE PRG CONTACTS, FONMIN MEDICI RESPONDED THAT ITALY HAS NO RPT NO INTENTION OF RECOGNIZING PRG AND EXPLAINED THAT HIS RECENT MEETING WITH HIEU INTENDED ONLY TO GAIN INFORMATION AND PRESS FOR OBSERVANCE OF TRUCE AND PARIS ACCORDS. OFFICIAL SAID SOUTH VIETNAMESE APPEARED TO ACCEPT MEDICI' S EXPLANATION. MEDICI ALSO RECOMMENDED THAT SOUTH VIETNAMESE ELECTIONS TAKE

PLACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, AND EXPLAINED ITALIAN READINESS TO EXTEND AID TO VIETNAM WITHIN EC CONTEXT, PARTICULARLY IN AGRICULTURAL FIELD. SOURCE SAID THIEU RESPONDED FAVORABLY TO MEDICI' S COMMENTS ON POSSIBLE AGRICULTURAL AID, NOTING TREMENDOUS TASK OF RESETTLING SOUTH VIETNAMESE REFUGEES.

7. PRESIDENT LEONE RAISED PROBLEM OF PRISONERS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, NOTING THAT ITALIAN GOVERNMENT FACED CONTINUING INTERROGATIONS IN PARLIAMENT ON SUBJECT. THIEU GAVE FAMILIAR RESPONSE THAT CLAIMS OF 200,000 POLITICAL PRISONERS GROSSLY EXAGGERATED AND POINTED TO LARGE NUMBER OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRISONERS AS YET UNACCOUNTED FOR. HE SUGGESTED ITALIANS WERE VICTIMS OF COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA ON THIS MATTER. ITALIANS RESPONDED THAT GVN SHOULD IMPROVE ITS PROPAGANDA ON PRISONERS ISSUE TO COUNTER COMMUNIST EFFORTS. SOURCE SAID THAT WHILE IN ROME THIEU TAPED PRESS INTERVIEW DURING WHICH HE GAVE FULL EXPLANATION OF PRISONER QUESTION, AND LEONE IS MAKING EVERY EFFORT TO SEE THAT INTERVIEW IS BROADCAST ON ITALIAN TV.

8. SOURCE SAID THAT PRESIDENT THIEU MADE EXCELLENT IMPRESSION ON LEONE AND MEDICI BECAUSE OF HIS FORTHRIGHTNESS AND STRENGTH OF PERSONALITY. HE REMARKED THAT VISIT HAD SERVED TO CHANGE FOR BETTER THIEU' S IMAGE HERE, PARTICULARLY WITH MEDICI, WHO HAD BEEN RELUCTANT TO BE INVOLVED IN THIEU VISIT IN ANY WAY.

9. THIEU VISIT RECEIVED FEATURE COVERAGE FROM ITALIAN MEDIA WITH HEAVY EMPHASIS ON ELABORATE SECURITY PRECAUTIONS TAKEN BY GOI, AND PREDICTABLE SLANGING FROM LEFTIST PRESS. VISIT WAS MARKED BY A SERIES OF LEFTIST- SPONSORED ANTI- THIEU DEMONSTRATIONS AND OTHER INCIDENTS (SEPTEL); LARGEST MANIFESTATION WAS APRIL 7 MARCH, REPORTEDLY BY SEVERAL THOUSAND DEMONSTRATORS. ALL DEMONSTRATIONS WERE CAREFULLY CONTAINED BY ITALIAN SECURITY AUTHORITIES AND FONOFF SOURCE TOLD US IN STRICTEST CONFIDENCE
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THAT ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY HAD UNDERTAKEN TO KEEP DEMONSTRATIONS COOL IN RETURN FOR FONMIN MEDICI' S AGREEMENT TO RECEIVE PRG OFFICIAL HIEU. VOLPE

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